DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 293 TM 032 832

AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
TITLE Assessing Approaches in Upping Student Test Scores.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement Gains; Achievement Tests; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Scores; State Programs; *Test Coaching; Test Results; Testing Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses approaches to raising student test scores. At present, 49 of 50 states mandate tests for students in selected grades, and each school district is under pressure to have students score at a higher level than they did before. Teaching students to do better on tests is a frequent approach. It has some advantages, but also has the disadvantages of stressing drill on subject matter over higher levels of cognition and emphasizing some disciplines at the expense of others. Dedicating some class sessions to preparing students for multiple choice tests presents the same problems. Providing time before and after school to help students make up deficiencies in learning can increase achievement test results, but the costs to systems and students may be high. Summer sessions present similar advantages and disadvantages. Promoting parent participation in their children's schooling is another approach to increasing test scores that can have several advantages. Smaller class size is an approach that has many advantages, as is the provision of inservice education to teachers to help student achieve. The limitations of state mandated testing persist in spite of all these approaches, in that such tests center on how a student is doing on only one occasion, ignoring daily and sequential achievement. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 453 293

Assessing Approaches in Upping Student Test Scores

Marlow Ediger

TM032832

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Ediger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ASSESSING APPROACHES IN UPPING STUDENT TEST SCORES

With state mandated testing being very strong in the nation, forty-nine out of fifty states mandate tests be given to students in selected grades as they progress through the pubic school years. The results of these tests may appear in newspapers in report card form when making comparisons among the different school districts. Each school district is under pressure to have students score at a higher level than previously. Students in low socio economic areas are to score on an equivalent level with those of suburbia. Lower socio economic areas hove always had lower test results from students as compared to those living in favorable socio economic areas such as in suburbia. Students from poor homes just have not had the educational opportunities as compared to those from suburban areas (See Ediger, 2000, Chapter Fourteen). Money spent in any educational endeavor speaks loudly indeed. Adequate financing of the pubic schools can make for

1. hiring high quality teachers with higher salaries provided for each teacher.
2. increased supplies of up to date textbooks, supplementary texts, library books, and consumable instructional materials.
3. state of the art technology available to students in ongoing learning opportunities.
4. paid aid service to assist students to achieve at a higher level due to one on one or small group instruction.
5. school buildings in proper shape and designed for instruction in the 21st century. Leaky roofs, drafty buildings in cold weather, broken windows, steam radiators and pipes used for heating in winter, no air conditioning in warm weather, toilets which do not work properly, and bad odors/lack of cleanliness due to a lack of janitorial supplies, among other things, make for inadequate learning environments for students.
6. a proper student/teacher ratio in the classroom. When there are too many students in a classroom, the teacher has a difficult time to provide for individual differences in a classroom. The author supervised a student teacher in a small classroom with 32 pupils therein. He could not walk between the rows of pupils due to the narrowness of space. One result was the impossibility of having quality discipline to make good instruction possible.
7. a school library conducive to having students doing much reading on their own in school and in the home setting. A school library needs to have books on a variety of genres and titles, as well as having library books on different reading levels to meet student needs.
8. adequate funding to have a good after school curriculum for students. The after school program may stress the academics, recreational pursuits, as well as emphasizing areas of interest for students to pursue.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

9. counseling and guidance services, as well as adequate emphasis placed upon art, music, and physical education programs for all. For example, may elementary schools have one art teacher for three buildings. The poor art teacher can hardly practice his/her profession with a fifteen minute period of time for each classroom, two times a week. The time allotment is so inadequate for each class that these art classes become a flop for even the best of teachers. Then too, having so many students makes it impossible to even identify students with exceptional talent in art.

10. adequate health services available in making attempts to remedy problems relating to the well being of each student. Physiological needs of individual students must be met if learners are to achieve in school (Ediger, 2000, 36-42).

Teachers, administrators, parents, and the lay pubic need to assess how well the above ten needs are being met in a school. A five point Likert scale may be used to rate each category. There are a plethora of ways in which schools need to be funded much more adequately when raising the bar for student achievement. Adequate funding can make for more optimal achievement of each student in physical, emotional, social, and academic development. If society truly feels that tests scores need to be upped, then diagnosing and remedying inherent weaknesses of a school district need to be in the offing.

Specific Approaches Used in Upping Student Test Scores

There are strengths and weaknesses of approaches presently using to aid students, during class time, in doing better on state mandated tests. Teaching students to achieve higher on tests is being used quite frequently in different schools and school districts. Advantages given for using this procedure are the following:

1. it provides opportunities for students to do well in the basics, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, in particular.
2. it helps students to learn what is essential which will be useful presently and at the work place in the future.
3. it assists students to move away from learning that which is of lesser value in school achievement. Raising the bar in school achievement is important for each student.

Disadvantages are the following:

1. higher levels of cognition should be stressed in the curriculum such as critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving, rather than drill on subject matter to be tested.
2. academic disciplines not tested upon might well receive short shrift.

3. drill is the lowest level of cognition and is not useful in every day tasks encountered.

A second method used to up student test scores is to have class sessions given to preparing students for taking multiple choice tests. There are selected skills and knowledge needed for students to take state mandated tests. Advantages given for doing so include the following:

1. test scores need to be as high as possible if teacher pay is to be given based on student test performance.
2. test scores need to be optimal since report cards issued make comparisons among school districts within a state.
3. test scores are used to judge the quality of a school and thus need to be as high as possible (See Ediger, 2000, 210-211).

Disadvantages in using class sessions to teach test taking skills are the following:

1. test taking skills generally are not too useful in society since individuals at the work place are assessed in quality and amount of work performed, not on how well a person did on a test.
2. time devoted to teaching test taking skills take away time from teaching and learning opportunities in different curriculum areas, especially those not covered on the test.
3. instructional time is already a scarce commodity. Balance in the curriculum is necessary such as adequate time spent on teaching reading and the language arts, social studies, science, mathematics, art, music, and physical education (Ediger, 2000, 131-135).

A third approach used to up test score results is to use before and after school time to help students make up deficiencies in learning. Advantages for doing so include the following:

1. selected students need more time as compared to others to learn what is essential and on the test.
2. selected students need to experience diagnosis and remediation to do better on tests.
3. selected students learn subject matter more slowly as compared to others and these learners need to have content explained in different ways and using diverse methods of instruction which before and after school time can provide.

Disadvantages given for using before and after school time to shore up test results are the following:

1. the involved student may well lose out on time for recreation and lessons in piano, dance, and or vocal/singing.
2. increased time in drill for testing purposes may make for lost interest in learning per se.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

3. the sessions may be perceived as punishment for sins committed and uncommitted (Ediger, 2000, 20-29).

Fourth, summer sessions are increasing in number for students to attend. Many of these sessions are devoted to teaching the basics which in return should up student test scores.The author believes only in having summer school available for all students, not students who receive failing grades only. The objectives and learning opportunities should stimulate student learning through a variety of interesting learning activities. These activities need to pinpoint objectives of instruction. Students do need to be challenged to achieve as optimally as possible. Advantages given for students to attend summer school include the following:

1. the summer months are long in length and students may forget a considerable amount of what has been learned during the regular nine months school term. Summer school assists students to achieve objectives during what normally is vacation time.
2. summer school assists students to achieve improved sequence in learning when they are related to the nine months regular school curriculum.
3. the summer school curriculum can be very enriching and valuable for most students.

Disadvantages given for having students in summer school may well be the following:

1. drilling slow learners, in particular, on subject matter to up test scores may well defeat student interest in the curriculum.
2. too many school sessions may hinder student achievement, in general.
3. focusing too much attention on the academics may well hinder student achievement in the fine arts, the practical arts, and physical education. For example, with obesity being a problem of many young people, a quality physical education program needs to be in the offing (Ediger, 2000, Chapter 28).

Fifth, it is good to have parents help with educating their offspring. The home setting with purposeful homework may well be a good place to assist students to achieve as optimally as possible. Further advantages here are the following:

1. the home and the school need to work together for the well being of the child.
2. the home may well assist the school to achieve curricular objectives more thoroughly.
3. the home setting may supplement student needs which the school is also attempting to do. These needs include physiological, love

and belonging, security, and recognition.

Disadvantages of the home setting involved in teaching their offspring center on the following:

1. excessive amounts of time given to drill to up test scores.
2. formality in student learning while minimizing of social, emotional, leisure time, and moral learnings.
3. a narrow focus on student test score achievement as compared to developing the well rounded person in all facets of development.

In an article entitled, "A Quiet Crisis: Unprepared for High Stakes," (Education Week, April 18, 2001), the following quote appeared:

Despite the intensive push, bringing all Putnam, Massachusetts students up to the state standards remains a formidable task. Among tenth graders who took the exam last year, 94% failed the English section, 95% failed in mathematics, and 91% fell short on the science portion.

Similar scenarios are playing out around the country, as the drive to hold secondary students to more rigorous academic standards and tests reveal a quiet crisis. A large proportion of students who are already in high school are not yet doing high-school level work.

The above quote refers to students taking the state mandated test titled <u>The Massachusetts Assessment of Comprehensive Skills.</u> These students are caught in the transition when moving from the traditional standards for high school graduation to the new state mandated test.

Sixth, smaller class size has also been used to up test scores on state mandated tests. Smaller class size is to be praised, The more students there are in any classroom, the more difficult it is for the teacher to assist each student. Advantages given for smaller class size to up student test scores are the following:

1. the teacher may be better able to help each student do better in testing when the numbers in a class are fewer. Diagnosis and remediation can be stressed more in situations such as these as compared to an increase in student number.
2. there are fewer students for students to rub elbows with, making for better human relations as compared to a highly crowded classroom. Good human relations should make for less stress and a more strong focus on achieving objectives in the school setting.
3. there may be a better opportunity for students to experience not only the basics, but also art, music, and physical education classes.

Disadvantages given for smaller class size may come about when

1. drill for taking state mandated tests becomes the major

objective of instruction. Excessive amounts of time given to drill may well defeat interest and enthusiasm for learning.

2. higher levels of cognition are deemphasized including critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving.

3. the three r's receive too much stress with science and social studies, art, music, and physical education deemphasized. The 3 r's, especially reading and mathematics, are covered quite thoroughly on state mandated tests and thus receive more emphasis in classroom teaching.

Advantages for smaller class size of students are the following:

1. the teacher can provide more individual help to students who need assistance.

2. the teacher needs to supervise fewer students which can make for fewer discipline problems in a classroom.

3. a quality curriculum can be in the offing for each student. The curriculum may stress the three r's, science, social studies, art, music, and physical education (See Houston and Bryant, 1997).

Seventh, some schools have provided teachers with inservice education to up student test scores on state mandated tests. Inservice education opportunities can be excellent if it focuses upon students doing well in the diverse curriculum areas. Breadth/depth of subject matter and skills need to be stressed rather than drill for doing well on state mandated tests alone. Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, (1993) advocates breadth in scope and quality sequence in the school curriculum. Thus, Gardner advocates that students experience each of the eight intelligences in the different curriculum areas of the school curriculum with the strongest intelligence being used to reveal what has been learned. These intelligences are the following with the author providing a brief explanation for each:

1. verbal/linguistic. Reading, writing, and speaking activities are major objectives here. Test taking emphasizes these skills.

2. visual/space. Art products and processes may be used by the student to indicate what has been learned in each curriculum area.

3. logical/mathematics. Reasoning, logic, and problem solving predominate in arithmetic, algebra, geometry, statistics, among other branches of mathematics.

4. musical/rhythmic. Musical ability emphasizes student capabilities in writing lyrics and musical scores. Dance activities, too, are important in the rhythmic realm.

5. intrapersonal. The student works best on an individual basis to achieve more optimally as compared to cooperative learning endeavors.

6. interpersonal intelligence. Students in this category work/achieve more optimally in committees rather than individual

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

endeavors.

7. bodily/kinesthetic. Athletic and physical prowess are intelligences used most readily by individuals who excel in this category.

8. scientific. These are students who are strong in the curriculum area of science and do well in objective thinking.

Inservice opportunities should provide teachers and administrators with opportunities to

1. develop quality objectives containing knowledge, skills, and attitudinal goals.

2. learning opportunities which assist student to achieve vital objectives in each curriculum area. A variety of learning opportunities should be in the offing to provide for individual differences among learners.

3. diverse kinds of evaluation instruments should be used to ascertain student achievement including port folios, rubrics, teacher observation, checklists and rating scales, journal writing, as well as valid and reliable tests to measure achievement.

If inservice education for teachers stresses teaching to up student test scores on state mandated tests, a very narrow focus in teaching is then in evidence indeed. This is true for several reasons

1. state mandated tests change as new governors come into being. Within the last ten years with three different governors in Missouri, The Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST), The Core Competencies and Key Skills (CCKS), and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) have been sequential state mandated tests with cut off points to notice successful achievement of students. This means that inservice education for teachers would stress learning to teach so that students may achieve goals in these tests in the school year they are emphasized.

2. state mandated tests and their multiple choice test items measure only a small segment of what students can and could learn. Life in the here and now does not stress being proficient in responding to multiple choice test items. Rather, children read, write, speak, listen, interact with each other socially, play, listen to TV and radio, take piano and/or dance lessons, attend religious services, and sleep/rest, among other things. Rarely, do they take tests other than at school. The work place also rarely emphasizes test taking to assess worker progress, but emphasizes the assessment of actual doing and accomplishing.

3. state mandated tests are expensive to develop, publish, and score. Much of the money rather could be spent on instructional materials so that students attain vital objectives. With machine scoring, many tests can be scored quickly, but the results may be slow in coming back to the teacher and the students. These tests are taken completely out of context, not within any learning opportunity. They are developed by those removed for the local classroom who are unfamiliar with the

students being tested. Test results, if each test item is seen by the teacher and students, provide little worthwhile feedback in terms of what was being studied in the classroom.

In Closing

Much time and effort goes into writing state mandated tests. These tests may be quickly prepared and omit valuable pilot studies data. Thus, data on validity and reliability may have received short shrift. Too many people feel that there is perfection involved in state mandated tests. A test is written and given to students and, "It tells it all about student achievement." The lay public needs to be informed of how state mandated tests are developed with their potential strengths and weaknesses. State mandated tests omit completely how well the student is doing in every day classroom work. The results from one state mandated test culls out what students have done and accomplished during the 180 days of regular schooling in one year. They are much more important then in determining how well a student is achieving as compared to the many hours of daily, sequential classroom achievement which each student can show and reveal.

References

Ediger, Marlow (2000), Teaching Reading Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter Fourteen.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Readiness for Learning Science," School Science, 38 (4), 36-42. Published by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), in India.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "The Principal and the Reading Curriculum," the Progress of Education, 74 (9), 210-211. Published in India.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Phonics and Poetry in the Classroom," Experiments in Education, 28 (8), 131-135.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "The School Principal as a Leader in Reading Instruction, Reading Improvement, 37 (1), 20-29.

Ediger, Marlow (2000), "Psychological Foundations of Teaching," Teaching Mathematics Successfully. New Delhi, India: Discovery Publishing House, Chapter 28.

Education Week (April 18, 2001), "A Quiet Crisis: Unprepared for High Stakes," pp 1 and 12.

Gardner, Howard (1993), Multiple Intelligences: Theory into Practice. New York: Basic Books.

Houston, Paul, and Anne Bryant, ""Engage the Public in the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, 78: 756-759.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE